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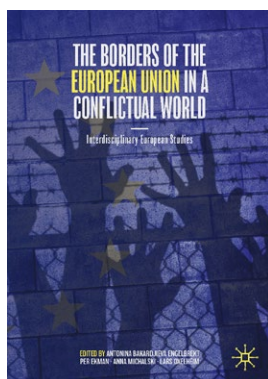
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Palgrave Macmillan published an edited volume that brings together interdisciplinary research examining the European Union's borders amid ongoing geopolitical, security and humanitarian conflicts. The volume explores borders, their governance, contestation and redefinition, thus highlighting their political, social and spatial implications.

The book explores how these borders are shaped by a global environment of conflicting norms, rising strategic tensions, rivalry and competition between systems and regulatory frameworks. It focuses on the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the resulting geopolitical shift on European security and trade power, while also examining the Union's capacity to project norms, the insider-outsider dynamics of its international market regime, and the evolution of border policy as it seeks to balance security with openness.

The basic point of departure of the book is that following the fall of the Soviet Union and the transformation



of socialist countries into liberal democracies, a specific European security order emerged. This order was shaped primarily through the integration of post-socialist states into the institutional frameworks of the European Union and NATO, which provided both political stability and security guarantees. However, this security architecture was significantly challenged by Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and it was definitively broken by the Russian military action against Ukraine in February 2022. As a result, long-standing assumptions about stability, borders and cooperation in Europe have been fundamentally reassessed. *"Russia's war against Ukraine can be seen at once as a military assault on the role of the EU in Europe and constitutes as such the most direct and clear challenge to the Union's ability to act in accordance with its values."* (p. 119-120); therefore, *"Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine will affect Europe's borders for a long time to come."* (p. 233)

Furthermore, global warming and unstable weather patterns are expected to intensify migration pressures. Extreme heat, droughts and other climate-related disasters force people to leave their home countries in search of safety and livelihood. Consequently, Europe may face growing waves of climate-induced displacement and cross-border movement, which could further strain capacities across the region, including political, social and economic dimension.

In this increasingly unstable global environment, where “*the EU’s external borders are likely to remain the physical flashpoint of the insecurity and war...*” (p. 278), the European Union’s internal and external borders are gaining renewed political, strategic and security-related significance amid intensifying tensions.

Antonina Bakardjieva Engelbrekt, Per Ekman, Anna Michalski and Lars Oxelheim address the perspectives on the significance of borders in Europe. The authors note that the concept of borders has developed in a distinct way in Europe compared with many other regions of the world. In Europe, borders were primarily understood as dividing lines between inhabited territories, whereas in other continents the frontier often represented the boundary between settled land and wilderness. The chapter offers a historical interpretation of borders, examining how the border and bordering concepts were understood in different eras, such as during Roman times, the Middle Ages, the Peace of Westphalia, the 20th century, the Cold War and the period of globalisation.

Johanna Pettersson Fürst presents a chapter on EU border policy, explaining how the EU and its member states address the various challenges they face in this area. While the member states opened up internal borders, the external borders remained untested. This approach was profoundly challenged by successive migration waves, first triggered by the Arab Spring in the early 2010s, and later by the major refugee crisis of 2015. These migration pressures, together with internal border closures during the COVID-19 pandemic and public health crises, have pushed border politics to the centre of European integration, challenging the long-standing assumption of open internal borders. As a result, the Schengen system has been put under intense pressure, revealing weaknesses in coordination, solidarity and crisis management. These developments have generated debates about the system’s resilience, its capacity to respond to future shocks and the long-term future of free movement within Europe.

This means that Europe’s borders were tightened internally and externally during the 2010s and 2020s. However, as the author notes “*...the introduction of internal border controls has not substantially reduced the willingness of member states to cooperate; on the contrary, it has in fact led to strengthened cooperation at the European level.*” (p. 32)

There are many consequences of this border reinforcement. One notable outcome is the resurgence of digital systems which are designed to monitor and survey borders more effectively. On the other hand, the reinforcement has fostered a ‘border - industrial complex’ in which political, economic and industrial interests and stakeholders mutually

reinforce each another. As a result, digital border-surveillance systems are increasingly locking us into complex and costly infrastructures, creating long-term dependencies and shaping policy priorities around technological investment. However, this 'lock-in effect' raises important concerns about the vulnerability of these systems, namely the risk of data breaches and the protection of the population's integrity and privacy. It also highlights how technological dependence can limit policy choices and create long-term security and ethical challenges.

Fredrik Sjöholm explores the resurgence of borders in the global economy and examines the trajectory of EU trade and economic policy. The world appears to be entering a new phase in which globalisation has been losing its momentum. This loss is appropriately mirrored by the collapse of trade liberalisation in the last decade and half, while trade negotiations with China have experienced serious difficulties, too. Consequently, the political commitment to globalisation has weakened, and some regions have replaced highly open, outward-looking market policies with more inward-focused approaches. These shifts cannot be ignored by the European Union, because its economic policy is partly dependent on developments in China and in the United States.

As a result of these shifts in global economic policy, particularly China's state-driven economic model with its subsidies and the United States' growing protectionism, the EU has also begun to move towards a more interventionist and protectionist direction. This trend is reflected in increased industrial policy measures, strategic investment screening

and efforts to safeguard key sectors and supply chains, as well as in the growing use of trade protecting instruments to support the European industries, as the author writes, "*Exactly how much of the measures that actually will be implemented is uncertain, but it is clear that the idea of a more interventionist industrial policy has gained a foothold and is spreading across the Union.*" (p. 64)

Additionally, European stakeholders argue that the EU is falling behind its competitors in other countries, particularly in high-tech industries. This lag has shifted the prevailing understanding of the relationship between the economy and the state, promoting a growing belief in the ability of the state to generate positive impacts through strategic intervention and industrial policy. Nevertheless, the final message of the chapter is, "*as China and the US turn increasingly inward, the EU needs to step up and take greater responsibility for global trade liberalization. The challenge is great and requires a focused effort to both establish new trade agreements, particularly with the US and to revitalize the WTO.*" (p. 69)

Marja-Liisa Öberg focuses on the boundaries of the internal market within and beyond the European Union. She examines the internal market and the acceptance of the EU's internal market *acquis* by third countries as a form of normative expansion. From this perspective, internal market has profoundly evolved itself from merely legal framework to a deeper and legally binding form of regulatory cooperation. Integration through the internal market emerges either as a path toward EU membership, or as an alternative form of integration that does not entail full membership. As a result, internal market should be rather

understood “...as a dynamic and geographically inclusive form of cooperation between the Union and its periphery.” (p. 87)

The chapter underlines a particular normative interpretation of the internal market, according to which the EU and its internal market *acquis* should not be understood as a purely altruistic project, but there is a need to recognise that it is driven primarily by economic and profit-oriented incentives. That means the internal market is narrated as a policy instrument capable of securing long-term commitments from neighbouring countries, while simultaneously strengthening their economic performance, institutional frameworks and societal structures. Consequently, the expansion of the internal market *acquis* and deeper, more intensive cooperation generate greater benefits for both partners, the EU and the neighbouring country.

The author formulates the argument as follows, “While the formal, physical and administrative borders of the EU remain, the boundaries of the internal market continue to be blurred and the European integration project broadened and deepened for the benefit of security and prosperity in the region.” (p. 89) Nevertheless, this normative expansion should not be understood as a form of hegemony, but rather as a relationship of complex interdependence between the EU and its cooperating partner countries.

Ann-Kristin Jonasson contributes a chapter on the EU’s promotion of norms in an increasingly conflictual world. In the early 1990s, the European Union was widely portrayed as a ‘normative power’. This narration describes the European Union as an actor that is qualitatively distinct from

others in the global arena due to its value-based foundations and its capacity to shape international norms, such as promotion of democracy and climate action.

However, the promotion of norms is more effective in some areas and regions than in others. A key reason for this variation is that the EU’s interest in diffusing values differs across regions and issue areas. For example, the EU has been relatively successful in promoting climate action in the Mediterranean region, as there is a genuine shared interest in environmental sustainability and survival, but this is largely absent when it comes to the promotion of democratic norms. With regard to the promotion of democracy, such efforts may, at least in the short term, lead to instability and insecurity. Therefore, both parties tend to avoid this instability, particularly as the “...EU has no interest in the migration flows that such a situation would generate” (p. 112). Moreover, the perceived ‘failure’ of democracy promotion is strongly influenced by the absence of key prerequisites for successful norm diffusion, most notably the partner state’s weak commitment to democratic norms.

The author advances two principal recommendations. First, the EU should improve its approach to promote democratic values by adopting a more sensitive strategy that emphasises local understandings of democracy rather than imposing top-down models. Locally rooted interpretations of democratic norms may better integrate diverse segments of local society. Second, the EU should consistently uphold its normative values, even when doing so may conflict with short-term interests. “In the inevitable conflict between interests and values, the latter needs to be

prioritised over short-term interests. The EU needs to genuinely stand by its own values in the norm promotion and work to ensure that the norm-takers also embrace them.” (p. 113)

Pär Hallström examines the extent to which the European Union can project its social market economy model beyond its territorial boundaries. The social market economy, characterised by a blend of competitive markets and robust social protection, is presented as a normative core of the EU's internal economic order. The author argues that the EU's external influence is not limited to trade and regulatory power, but is deeply rooted in its capacity to promote a normative framework based on the rule of law, democratic governance, human rights and social welfare principles. To be more exact, *“Waiting for Godot, the EU is still influencing global neighbours through its soft and economic powers and with law as an instrument in order to make them approach the EU ideals.”* (p. 143) However, the EU's influence is constrained by the competitive presence of alternative models, notably China's state-led development approach, which offers partner countries a non-conditional and investment-driven alternative pattern. Thus, while the EU remains a powerful normative actor, its capacity to shape global economic governance is increasingly contested.

The chapter outlines several mechanisms through which the EU attempts to export its social market economy model. First, through economic integration and trade agreements, thus the EU uses conditionality and rule transfer to encourage partner countries to adopt EU-style standards. Second, the EU leverages its soft power and institutional credibility to shape policy

preferences in neighbouring and developing countries. Third, multilateral institutions and global governance arenas, including the WTO, serve as platforms for diffusing EU regulatory norms.

The ability of the EU to extend its social market economy model is significant, but it is uneven. Its success depends on a few key factors. First, partner countries must be willing to accept and follow EU rules and standards. Second, the European Union needs to stay united and consistent in its policies. Finally, the broader geopolitical situation also matters, especially as global competition between different political and economic models becomes stronger.

Torbjörn Becker and Anders Åslund investigate the EU's dependence on Russian energy. Europe's reliance on Russian energy is not a new issue, it was already prominent in the 1970s, when West Germany wanted to build gas pipelines connecting Western Siberia and West Germany. At the time, the U.S. President Ronald Reagan was unable to stop the initiative and a strong, decades-long energy cooperation was established between Germany and Russia, hence establishing long-term economic dependency on each other. Today, the same issue has returned. As the author articulates the fundamental issue, *“...the differences in the member states' energy balances are a perfect breeding ground for political disagreements within the Union regarding everything from climate goals, taxonomy, and the relationship with Russia, including sanctions”* (p. 151). Subsequently, there is a difficulty in reaching any energy consensus towards Russia after its military action towards Ukraine.

The authors argue that energy savings are necessary, because such measures can help reduce the EU's dependence on Russian energy imports. They caution that a complete cut off from Russian gas would pose major challenges, including potential supply shortages, economic disruptions and the need for rapid development of alternative energy sources.

However, the chapter claims that only a strong cohesion of the European Union can end the dependence on Russian energy and help to convert the continent towards green energy resources. Moreover, the switch of energy suppliers and energy sources within a few years would help to ensure energy independence from the Russian Federation on one hand, while also supporting climate goals and the fight against climate change on the other. *"This is an investment that will yield returns for generations to come in terms of both safety and environmental and climate goals and adds to the credibility of continued sanctions on Russian hydrocarbon-based energy."* (p. 171)

Kjell Engelbrekt discusses a chapter on the European security order. The chapter offers a brief introduction to the evolution and development of the European security architecture since 1946, underlying the key institutions and their role, including the European Union, NATO, the Council of Europe and the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. The chapter underlines that two distinct and fundamentally antagonistic security orders have been produced since 2010. According to one understanding, stability is based on military power, great-power politics and *"Russia represents an almost stereotypical illustration of the first-mentioned approach"* (p. 211), while the other approach emphasises

multilateral frameworks, diplomacy and economic interdependence, thereby forming a polycentric security order.

Russia has sought to redefine security arrangements in the Eurasian space through great-power politics, particularly by emphasising its demand for political non-intervention in the former Soviet space, in this way signalling its sphere of interest. Nonetheless, the author underlines some positive consequences of this Russian behaviour, namely *"It bears noting too that the EU and NATO, after decades of friction and mutual rivalry in the area of security, seem to have reached a new consensus as a result of the Ukraine war and their concerted action in 2022–23. This consensus applies not least to the need for an autonomous European conventional military capacity that can be deployed in the continent's immediate proximity."* (p. 217) Consequently, the European Union is compelled to respond to these security challenges by developing a more robust security and defence policy. This includes enhancing usable military capabilities, strengthening strategic stamina and military resilience, and fostering closer cooperation on defence capabilities with industrial partners and academia.

Anders Åslund and Torbjörn Becker write a chapter about a comprehensive European Marshall Plan for Ukraine which aims to guide Ukraine's reconstruction and integration into the European Union. Ukraine's recovery should not merely involve emergency humanitarian aid, but it should be designed as a strategic and long-term economic reconstruction project that is able to accelerate transition of Ukraine toward the EU standards. The authors emphasise that reconstruction must begin as soon as hostilities decrease.

There is a need for a coordinated European framework that avoids fragmented national initiatives and ensures rapid deployment of funds and expertise.

They underline the necessity of a European reconstruction agency, which would be an institutional mechanism that would coordinate aid, manage investments and ensure compliance with EU regulations and anti-corruption standards. The plan should prioritise grant-based assistance rather than loans, in order to prevent Ukraine from falling into debt dependency. Reconstruction efforts should focus on rebuilding infrastructure, modernising energy systems and accelerating the green transition, while also supporting institutional reforms that strengthen governance and the rule of law.

The authors also frame reconstruction as an integral part of Ukraine's EU accession trajectory. The Marshall Plan should be linked explicitly to EU integration, thereby providing political incentives for reform and harmonising economic frame of Ukraine with European markets. The chapter presents the Marshall Plan as both a moral obligation and as a strategic investment in European security and stability.

To conclude, the edited volume of Antonina B. Engelbrekt, Per Ekman, Anna Michalski and Lars Oxelheim 'The *Borders of the European Union in a Conflictual World. Interdisciplinary European Studies*' offers a detailed exploration of how the EU's internal and external policies have evolved in response to shifting geopolitical dynamics, particularly the intensifying clash between the EU and the Russian Federation. The book adopts a clearly pro-integration and

pro-EU stance, emphasising the benefits of deeper political and economic cooperation within the European framework. It presents the European project as the most viable path to stability, development and democratic consolidation in the region. At the same time, the authors take a sharply critical view of the Russian Federation's behaviour since 2014, particularly regarding its actions in Crimea and in Ukraine. The narrative portrays Russia's behaviour as a deliberate challenge to the post-Cold War European security order, undermining the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and peaceful cooperation that frame the EU's external relations. The book also provides valuable insights into the role of the internal market, normative power and institutional cooperation in shaping regional stability and strategic alignment in the post-Soviet space. Therefore, it calls for a strong and unified European response to Russia, emphasising coordinated political, economic and security measures to uphold the European order and to deter further aggression in the neighbourhood.

This edited volume is likely to be of interest to the academic community, especially students and researchers who study European integration processes, the European Neighbourhood Policy, geopolitics, international relations and border studies.